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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the positive changes in the organizational climate and the role of the principal in one high school during four years of implementing the Spencerport (New York) Effective Schools/Teaching Project. A gradual increase in the building level commitment of the project has led to a redefinition of leadership to include the Building Planning Team, the principal, assistant principals, and members of various subcommittees created by the Planning Team. The yearly establishment of agreed-upon goals has improved communication, cooperation, and participative decisionmaking on (1) allocation of resources; (2) specific issues such as training teachers in the preparation of criterion-referenced tests; (3) the development, chairing, and carrying out of goals of subcommittees, and (4) agenda preparation. These changes have resulted in major shifts in the relationship of the Planning Team to the school principal and in the principal's role. Because team members have assumed more responsibilities, the principal's role has shifted from that of director and supervisor to that of advisor and resource person. Administrative staff services have also changed in the past four years, especially in areas of student discipline and teacher supervision. Supervisory and support services changes are still in process. (IW)

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SPENCERPORT CENTRAL SCHOOLS

SPENCERPORT, N.Y.

Effective Schools/Teaching Project

Its Impact On A Senior High Principal

By

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December 1986

EA 019 219

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District involvement in the More Effective Schools/Teaching self-improvement project has had a gradual but dramatic impact on the way I do my job as building principal. Over the past four years there has been a gradual increase in the building level commitment to the project. This has led to a redefinition of leadership to include the Building Planning Team, the principal, assistant principals, and the members of various sub-committees created by the Building Planning Team. I now spend more time on different types of leadership activities.

The establishment of agreed upon goals each year has significantly changed my relationship with all district office personnel. We now have an agreed upon basis for both decisions on the allocation of resources and for determining the degree of success that the E.J. Wilson School's principal has had. This provides a much firmer basis for communication and cooperation.

As my responsibilities for managing change within the building have grown, so has the area in which I am expected to make decisions. In his series of pamphlets called "The Master Teacher," Robert L. DeBruyn points out that the only way to keep the power we hold is to share it.

We are sharing power in our district. It began with the Superintendent demonstrating a willingness to share power by accepting the concept of a building level problem analysis/prioritization/solution plan cycle. This has freed me to learn to share power with the Building Planning Team.

When we started in 1983 the Planning Team advised me. I prepared the agenda and did whatever had to be done to cause goals to be accomplished. Team input influenced the annual report on our plans, but I wrote the plan and the report. Gradually the team members began to see themselves as able to interact with peers on specific issues such as training teachers in the preparation of criterion referenced tests and chairing sub-committees such as the one preparing the "Clear School Mission". I continued to provide most of the direction as to how tasks would be accomplished and to supervise directly most goal plans.

This year we are experiencing a major shift in the role of the Building Planning Team. Individual team members accept responsibility for developing sub-committees and carrying out goals. The meetings are chaired by team members on a rotating basis. Each chairperson has responsibility for preparing the agenda. The immediate past chairperson prepares the meeting minutes for distribution within the building and to the District Office. My role has shifted to that of advisor and resource person.

I spend much more time tending faculty/staff in relation to both building plan goals and other matters of concern to the staff. One monthly Building Planning Team meeting is devoted to our annual goals and a second to general building concerns. This is a direct result of opening committee leadership and sharing agenda preparation. We found at the second meeting this year that we had fourteen agenda items as opposed to the usual three or four. An analysis of the agenda revealed that there were two categories of items: those dealing with our annual goals and

those requesting action on matters of concern to faculty and/or staff members. It was the consensus of the team that we meet twice a month instead of monthly. This has permitted us to have an agenda dealing with each category on a monthly basis. This trade off -- meeting time for services -- also applies to the evolving relationship of our building administrators.

Services expected of the administrative staff at E.J. Wilson have changed drastically in the past four years. This is particularly true with respect to the areas of student discipline and teacher supervision. Maintenance of satisfactory student behavior remains a significant expectation of both the community and the staff. But the means of achieving this goal have shifted from a "them"; i.e., principal and assistant principal; to "us"; i.e., principal, assistant principals, teachers, staff and community. This is an area in which application of the concept of teacher empowerment has produced dramatic results. Teachers now follow-up on apparent "cuts". The assistant principal's office keeps a file of their reports and confers with students and parents when they exceed the limit. Study and implementation of Assertive Discipline was teacher initiated and guided through implementation at the classroom level by our Building Planning Team. Successful projects such as these have had a dramatic impact on teachers' perception of their power to control student behavior. We are also looking at our support services from a different angle. If we can increase clerical participation, perhaps we can free up time for more attention to teacher supervision.

Quality instruction in the classroom has always been a general expectation. The continuing focus on student achievement and the implementation of the view that all students can learn has meant that this expectation has new prominance and very specific definition. This high expectation has led to a continuing reorganization of supervisory and support resources. Now, however, we have staff trained in the elements of instruction and supervisors trained in clinical supervision. We have shifted from grade level organization with an emphasis on direct services to students by the principal and assistant principals to a more traditional system. That is, I perform an overall supervisory function in the building with an emphasis on interacting with professional staff. One assistant principal has student attendance and discipline as top priority. The other assistant principal has as a top priority staff development including clinical supervision and the development of a building follow-up program to support implementation of the elements of instruction in the classroom.

At least that is where we are now. It seems to me that the Building Planning Team and students are telling me that we need to be doing something to bring the students directly into this process.

What if .....